Evangeline's People Rebuild Acadia

By FRED L. HOLMES

LOUISIANA is rich in romantic interest. It has a touch of the Old World and the New, a dash of chivalry and an abundance of the American business spirit.

It is as impossible to think of Louisiana without its historic background of the French, the Spanish régime, and the Acadian settlers made famous by the story of Longfellow's Evangeline, as it is to speak of the South without its fields of cotton and cane. Everywhere in the state can be found the visual evidences of a past that is easily traceable step by step through the various epochs of national history.

New Orleans with its old French section, its Cabildo erected during the reign of Spain as the governing palace, later to become the scene of the transfer to the United States of the Louisiana Purchase; St. Louis Cathedral, one of the oldest church edifices in the United States; the quaint French houses, on narrow stone streets, that were visited by Aaron Burr, John J. Audubon, Andrew Jackson, the Pirate Jean La Fitte, Zachary Taylor, and others, is a city of compelling interest. Of equal charm are the quiet homesteads "with this simple people, who live like brothers together" in the Bayou Teche country, the heart of the "Land of the Acadians."

"On the banks of the Teche are the towns of St. Maur and St. Martin."

Historian and poet have vied with each other in relating the story of the Acadian exile. Ruthlessly torn from their Canadian homes by England in 1755 the tales of their wanderings along the Atlantic Coast and in the Mississippi Valley wilderness until many were again united with their people are limned with tragic sacrifices. When by the Treaty of Utrecht the English came into possession of Acadian territory in Canada, it was stipulated that they might withdraw to French possessions if they chose. Lingering on, hoping against hope that they would never be compelled to bear arms against the French, advised by priests to disregard the English mandates, they invited a calamity which came in 1755 when Charles Lawrence, the governor of Acadia, expelled the French from their possessions. Parkman says that "the Acadians, though calling themselves neutral, were an enemy encamped in the heart of the province," and adds "these are the reasons which appeared as a measure to be harsh and wholly justified."

Three generals were ordered by Governor Lawrence to seize their arms and bring in the inhabitants from these three Acadian communities. Some were gathered in churches on Sunday; others were driven in like cattle from their homes. In order to compel all to surrender, the torch was applied to their dwellings and churches. Crops were destroyed. The light of their burning homes, fanned by the wind, guided them to the awaiting transports.

"Unhappily, no resistance could be made, and the people were huddled like sheep on board transports, to be scattered along the coast among people speaking a language unknown to them and having a creed different from their own," says Alcee Frontier in his History of Louisiana. "The families were not always on the same ship; the father and mother, in some instances, were separated from their children; and many Evangelines never met their Gabriels. The lot of the exiles in the English colonies was generally hard. Very few remained where they had been transported. Many returned to their country, after incredible sufferings, to be again expelled in 1762; some went to France, where they formed a settlement at Belle Isle; some went to the Antilles; and some at last found a true home in hospitable Louisiana."

Some of the Acadian families treked across country from Maryland and Virginia to New Orleans, a French colony inhabited by people of their own race and professing the same religious creed. Others came there by vessels, and still others left the seaboard, crossed the mountains, and floated in rough boats down the Ohio and Mississippi.

Of one contingent of 840 settling in Louisiana the generations have multiplied to over 40,000.

The story of Evangeline seeking her lover, sleeping beneath an oak tree, has made memorable the long search of these separated people for reunion.

"There are about 5,000 oak trees in this section where it is claimed that Evangeline reposed for the night on her search for her lover," says D. D. Nuckolls, of the St. Landry *Clarion*, of Opelousas, Louisiana, the center of the Acadian settlement.

"Many a weary year has passed since the burning of Grand-Pré,
When on the falling tide the freighted vessels departed."

* * *

"It was the month of May. Far down the Beautiful River,
Past the Ohio shore and past the mouth of the Wabash,
Into the golden stream of the broad and swift Mississippi."

* * *

"Level the landscape grew, and along the shores of the river,
Shaded by china-trees, in the midst of luxuriant gardens,
Stood the houses of planter, with negro-cabins and dovecots.
They were approaching the region where reigns perpetual summer,
Where through the Golden Coast, and groves of orange and citron,
Sweeps with majestic curve the river away to the eastward.
They, too, swerved from their course; and, entered the Bayou of Plaquemine."

* * *

"They who dwelled there named it the 'Eden of Louisiana.'"

What scenes of joy over the arrival of some new contingent! Many a wife pressed to her bosom a long lost husband; many a parent found a loving child. Once more the Acadians were treading French soil; once more they were gathering together. By government arrangement lands were granted to them in the Teche region.

In Louisiana the principal settlements where dwell the descendants of the Acadians are in the parishes of St. Landry, St. James, and St. Martin. Opelousas is the county seat of St. Landry, and St. Martinville is the county seat of St. Martin's parish. Most of the territory occupied by the descendants of the Acadians is prairie-like, dotted with orchards of fruit trees. The Southern Pacific Railroad whirls through this dreamy region amid fields of cotton, rice, sugar cane, and small patches of corn, oats, hay, sweet and Irish potatoes, beans, sorghum, and other garden varieties. Roses bloom in profusion and palms of endless species furnish the centerpieces of many private yards.

Forty odd miles from New Orleans, in the parish of St. James, is being carried on a picturesque industry. First grown long before the Civil War by an Acadian whose name the tobacco now bears, the cultivation of Perique tobacco has been kept up continuously ever since, the direct lineal descendants of Perique being still engaged in the industry. Perique tobacco culture is confined to a very small area on the banks of the Mississippi, where the soil and climatic conditions are peculiarly adapted to its growth. It is used as a seasoner for mixtures, since it is an exceedingly strong tobacco, with a distinct flavor and aroma.

In recent years a diversified system of agriculture has been established and now cattle, sheep, and horses are being raised. The railroad traveler hurrying to his destination gets a sniff of fruit perfume from the rain-washed fields, oranges, lemons, grapes, plums, pomegranates, and peaches. Far in the distance can be seen timber clumps of cypress, oak, willow, sugar wood, and sycamore.

"The Acadians are, of course, in many respects the same people they were," says E. L. Stephens, president of the Southwestern Louisiana Industrial Institution, in Lafayette, Louisiana, in the heart of the Acadian district. "For example, in general features, physiognomy, religion, love of home and pastoral life, conservative adherence to the habits, customs, beliefs, and traditions of their fathers, and in the general characteristic traits both of the settlers in Nova Scotia and the original stock they came from on the coast of France. They still do a little, but not much, of the old-time weaving of quilts, rugs, and other such articles on homemade looms and spinning wheels. There seems to be a curious demand of the people of the North for this old homemade work of the Acadians."

As a people, they have not developed any distinctive kind of architecture. No longer do they live in thatched roof houses as they did in old Acadia, but now partake of the same improvement noticeable in the architecture of all the rest of the people. The average farmhouse of the older days was rather crude. Recent prosperity in the community has remodeled these structures into up-to-date homes. The old-time sheep and cattle ranches on large scale have disappeared—nor are there many large plantations owned by the Acadians. Their lands are much subdivided into small farms. As Catholics in France and Nova Scotia, they have clung to their faith through the centuries.

Congressman H. Garland Dupré is a great-great-great grandson of Laurent Dupré, one of the leading Acadian exiles to settle in the South. During the past thirty years Congressman Dupré has made his home at New Orleans, although he is fond of Opelousas and the St. Landry parish, and tells many interesting stories of quaint customs of his kinsmen.

"Many families and individuals of extraordinary ability and distinction have risen among the descendants of the exiles," declares Dr. Stephens. "From this number, particularly of the name of Mouton, Broussard, Landry, Martin, and Breaux—there have come governors, lieutenant-governors, congressmen, judges, justices of the Supreme Court, and United States Senators, of marked ability."

A simple, God-fearing people, fond of church and home, are the descendants of the exiles in the Evangeline country.

"Here no hungry winter congeals our blood like the rivers;
Here no stony ground provokes the wrath of the farmer;
Smoothly the plowshare runs through the soil, as a keel through the water.
All the year round the orange groves are in blossom; and grass grows
More in a single night than a whole Canadian summer."

Wonder Spots of Your Own U. S.

Photograph selected for THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT by National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

The Phantom Ship—Stranded on a Magic Shore; Crater Lake National Park, Oregon. Crater Lake is the deepest and bluest lake in the world. It measures two thousand feet of solid water, and the intensity of its color is unbelievable even while you look at it. Its cliffs from sky-line to surface are a thousand feet high. It has no inlet and no visible outlet, for it occupies the hole left when, in the dim ages before man, a volcano collapsed and disappeared within itself.